

SANITARY COMMISSION.

No. 5.



To the Presidents and Officers of the various Life Insurance Companies of the United States :

GENTLEMEN,—You are directly and largely interested in the lives of our brave soldiers, so many of whom are insured in your several offices. Their principal danger comes, as you are well aware, not from the force of the enemy, but from the ravages of those diseases always active in camps and fortresses, and especially so among inexperienced volunteer troops, suddenly subjected to change of climate, to unusual heat, and to great exposure. The officers in charge of the principal portion of these lives are brave, intelligent men, ready to shed their blood for the liberties of the country ; but they are without experience in the care of their soldiers, and, with the best intentions, must fail if not supported by extraneous efforts and experience, in saving them from pestilence and destruction in a ratio too fearful to name. In view of the enormous responsibility thrown by extraordinary events upon the Medical Bureau, and at the urgent instance of medical men at large, a Sanitary Commission has been appointed by the Government of the United States, to advise the War Department and the Medical Bureau, of the most efficient way of preventing disease among the troops and warding off general pestilence and rapid decimation, and to co-operate with them in their efforts to this end. Reasonable fears exist, that unless the most energetic efforts are made, one-half our whole volunteer force may not survive the exposures of the next four months.

This Commission is now in full organization, and ready to go to work. It wants money. It needs twenty thousand dollars in hand to proceed with vigor to its sublimely important work. It has declined asking or receiving money from the Government, for fear, it might thus forfeit its independent position, and lose in moral strength what it gained by government patronage. If the government supported it, its members would be appointed by the Government and acquire a political character, or be chosen not for their competency to the work, but from local and partisan reasons. We, choose then, to depend as long, and as far as we can, on the support of the public. And we look to the Life Insurance Companies, whose intelligent acquaintance with vital statistics constitutes them the proper and the readiest judges of the necessity of such a Commission, to give the first endorsement to our enterprise by generous donations, the best proof they can afford the public of the solid claim we have on the liberality of the rich, the patriotic, and the humane. We beg to remind you, moreover, that even those Life Insurance Companies which have no war-risks outstanding are directly and deeply interested in promoting the objects of this Commission. For no fact in medical history is better established than this—that diseases breaking out among soldiers in camp or garrison, for the want of prudent sanitary measures, and extending among them on any considerable scale, are soon shared by the community at large. The mere presence in any country of an army extensively infected, is a centre of poison to its whole people. If pestilence do not break out (as it commonly does), ordinary maladies assume a malignant and unmanageable type, and the general ratio of mortality is heightened in a fearful degree.

Our case is urgent, and every hour's delay is a serious blow to our success. We ask for prompt, nay, for immediate action. We wish to send skilled agents to every point of danger,—men

armed with the influence and authority of the Sanitary Commission,—to put all general officers and all medical men, the captains and all other responsible persons, whether in camps or fortresses, upon their guard ; to arouse an unusual attention to the subject of good cooking, regular meals, absolute cleanliness, proper ventilation, and the use of prophylactics. An examination of the papers accompanying this appeal, will show you the ampleness of our powers, and the vigor and completeness of our machinery. We can do a vast work, in a short time, if we have abundant means. Fifty thousand dollars would, we seriously think, enable us to save fifty thousand lives. Can there be any hesitation in furnishing such a sum, for such a vast and holy purpose ? And ought not, must not, your life insurance companies lead boldly and generously in this imperative duty ? We are willing to give our time, our thoughts, our energies, and whatever of skill, experience, and knowledge we may possess, to this work ; but we look to you and to the wealth of our cities to supply us with the money required to effect the beneficent objects proposed by the Sanitary Commission.

Very respectfully and fraternally, yours,

HENRY W. BELLOWES, President,

ALEX. D. BACHE,

WM. H. VAN BUREN, M. D.

WOLCOTT GIBBS, M. D.

C. R. AGNEW, M. D.

JOHN S. NEWBERRY, M. D. (Cleveland.)

FRED. LAW OLMSTED,

GEO. T. STRONG, Treasurer,

ELISHA HARRIS, M. D., Corresponding Sec'y.

Sanitary Commission,
(In Session in New York),
June 21st, 1861. }